

I call on you to hold an official public hearing in my state.

Before the disastrous 2003 decision to weaken media ownership rules (which a federal court has now overturned), you held only one official public hearing. Further, FCC officials met behind closed doors 71 times with major broadcasters – but only five times with public interest groups. And to justify your actions, you used deceptive, industry-sponsored research data.

The will of Big Media had been heeded at the expense of American citizens and democracy itself. This has to end. Before you rewrite the ownership rules, I demand an official public FCC hearing in my state, impartial and verifiable research, and transparent debates.

It is time to put the needs of democracy – a diverse, skeptical, independent and competitive media system – ahead of profit-hungry media giants.

For Immediate Release

Media Advisory

Friday, August 20, 2004

Contact: Ron Scott (313) 587-6466

Event: The Committee to Save Educational Radio in Detroit will mobilize people to review the public file of the DPS radio station, WRCJ, formerly known as WDTR, beginning Friday morning, August 20 at 10:00 a.m.

Committee Formed to Oppose the Leasing of Educational Radio

A committee of educators, artists, businesspersons, media personalities and community activists, have issued a public statement (see attachment) opposing the changes being made at the taxpayer-owned WRCJ, 90.9 FM.

Today, Friday, August 20, people from the Detroit community will begin the viewing of the public files of the station. This is taking place at the same time that the Detroit Public Schools is applying for the renewal of the broadcasting license for WRCJ. Under FCC rules, members of the public are allowed to make comments on the status and character of the station and whether it is serving the public interest.

The Committee to Save Educational Radio is calling for a series of public hearings on the future of WRCJ. We want the station to remain a non-commercial, community-oriented broadcast outlet serving the people of the city of Detroit and its surrounding communities.

We will make statements to the press Friday morning, August 20, beginning at 10:00 a.m. on the sidewalk outside the headquarters of WRCJ, located at 9345 Lawton, one block south of Chicago Blvd.

Committee to Save Educational Radio

http://michiganimc.org/newswire/display_any/6465

Save Educational Radio in Detroit---Oppose the
Leasing of WRCJ, 90.9 FM

Wednesday, 18 August 2004
By The Committee to Save Educational Radio in
Detroit

Summary: A broad group of community activists have formed a committee to oppose the leasing of Detroit Public Schools Radio, WRCJ, to private, outside interests

Save Detroit Educational Radio

Statement on the Current Situation at W-RCJ, 90.9 FM (Formerly known as W-DTR)

Adopted by the Committee to Save Educational Radio in Detroit at a Meeting Held on Wednesday, August 18, 2004

Introduction

There has been a tremendous amount of controversy recently surrounding the future of the radio station formerly known as W-DTR, 90.9 FM, which is owned and operated by the Detroit Public Schools. In July the call letters of the station were changed to W-RCJ, which presumably means "radio classics and jazz," perhaps giving a signal as to the future program

direction of the city and southeastern Michigan's only network whose mission has an exclusively public educational focus.

Over the years more people have relied on 90.9 FM to provide an alternative, non-commercial approach to broadcasting, something that is rare in today's media world of homogenized broadcasting where the corporate community and federal government determines the limits of what topics can be discussed and what music can be played. With the increasing uncertainty over the future of the station, a group of community activists, professionals, media personalities, educators and businesspersons have begun to meet and plan a course of action aimed at continuing the non-commercial educational orientation of W-RCJ.

During the month of June, the Detroit Public Schools administration announced that a Request for Proposals (RFP) would be issued to allow outside interests to bid for the prospective leasing of the station for the purpose of management and program direction. This decision was made absent of any public hearing or requests for comments by the employees of the Detroit Public Schools, the producers of the radio programs at the station or the general public, including the taxpayers of the city of Detroit who have subsidized the station since its formation some 56 years ago.

The initial deadline for the RFP to be submitted was July 28, 2004. Since this time the deadline has been extended. However, there has been no announcement by the DPS administration as to what the future program direction of the station will be after August 31. At the same time the broadcast license for the station is currently up for renewal. According to recent announcements over the airwaves of W-RCJ, the current license will expire on October

1,
2004.

Our group of concerned citizens are demanding answers to a series of questions about the future of W-RCJ. We are requesting the intervention from the Detroit Public Schools, the elected political officials in the city of Detroit, Lansing and Washington, D.C., as well as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to provide clear responses to the public in regard to why such a prized radio station must be turned over to outside interests for management. In addition, we are demanding that the community orientation of W-RCJ be maintained and that programming related to the concerns and interests of the African-American community, other communities of color and interested social groups remain paramount in any future management arrangement or programming format.

These changes at W-RCJ are taking place at a time when the Detroit Public Schools is laying off thousands of employees amid a huge budget deficit. At the same time, voters are being asked to decide in November on a proposal aimed at determining the future of how the system will be governed. After five years of direct state control, the financial crisis in the system has worsened. We support the right of Detroit taxpayers to determine how their school system is operated.

Background on Detroit Public Schools Radio

The Detroit Public Schools has owned and operated 90.9 W-DTR, now W-RCJ, continuously since 1948. It has served as a training facility for Detroit Public Schools students interested in careers and experiences in broadcasting. The station has a 47,000 watt signal for transmission. Its

listening audience coverage extends to at least 10 Southeastern Michigan counties including Genesee, Lapeer, Lanawee, Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne. The station can also be picked up in portions of southern Ontario, Canada as well as southern Ohio.

W-RCJ's former mission was "to provide District and community information, premiere broadcast training for our students and to engage parental involvement." The station has the potential to reach more than three million listeners. It has become an important community-based alternative to the increasing homogenization of voices and viewpoints on radio. It has given voice to community members shut-out by traditional commercial and public radio. Its current line-up includes a number of programs which give students broadcast production experience, jazz, reggae, world music, latin music and classic popular music programs. Particularly important is a 2.5 hour block of time on Sunday evenings that includes "Word Up," "Open Forum," and "Radio Africa Detroit," programs that analyze and discuss contemporary and historical events from an African-centered perspective.

The Transition Process Must be Democratic

Our contention is that the entire method for initiating changes at the station has not included the most important element in making W-RCJ what it has become and that is the general public. This public includes the taxpayers, the employees and producers who run the radio station. The audience which listens to W-RCJ has grown considerably over the last few years. Therefore, we are calling for the convening of a public hearing on the future of the station.

This hearing should be open to the general public and announced well in advance of its convening. All interested parties including management, employees, producers and listeners should be allowed to speak at this hearing.

At present the character of the current RFP process has been structured to exclude grassroots community organizations and social groups who could not respond in a timely fashion to the previous and altered deadlines for submissions. In addition, the fact that large-scale commercial and government interests have dominated the selection process has served as a means to discourage community participation in plans for the future of the radio station.

Consequently, the RFP process is privatizing the non-commercial, educational mission of the station. References to the Detroit Public Schools and its mission have been virtually excluded from the station's public service announcements and station identification. Yet the taxpayers of the city continue to subsidize the station and are the legal owners of the broadcast outlet.

Community and Cultural Content of W-RCJ Must be Maintained

The main reason cited by spokespersons of the DPS for placing the station up for lease is that it is not a viable economic entity. However, it has been brought to our attention that previous efforts aimed at underwriting, fundraising and marketing of the station have been thwarted by the DPS leadership. We feel that there is a base of financial support in the city and the broader region for the station to become self-sufficient. Such a financial program however, cannot be successful without the involvement of the community that the

station serves. We categorically reject any effort to establish a broadcast format at W-RCJ that ignores or poses an affront to the social aspirations of the people of the city of Detroit and its environs.

Recent data collected on the station's listenership indicates that the audience has grown and is one of the most diverse in the region. Callers to the talk radio programs on W-RCJ have expressed their support for the refreshing and intellectually stimulating information and discussion that are often heard over its airwaves. This alternative approach to broadcasting must be maintained and enhanced for the edification of the people in the listening audience.

W-RCJ Must Not Violate its Educational Mission

All radio stations must be licensed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and with the current renewal process underway at W-RCJ we intend to monitor and make comments about the past performance and future prospects of the network. If the station does not continue a programming format that is commensurate with its mission then its license should be challenged by the people of the city of Detroit. We cannot allow a public treasure such as W-RCJ to be utilized against the people of the city.

What the Public Can Do to Save Educational Radio in Detroit

At present we are calling for the general public to support our efforts aimed at saving W-RCJ as a non-commercial, public educational broadcast outlet in the city of Detroit. Also we are requesting that local elected officials take up this issue and to convene public hearings aimed at exposing what the current DPS leadership is doing to the station and how

this adversely effects the cultural integrity of the community.

We are asking the community to support us in the following ways:

I. Join the community task force to Save Educational Radio in Detroit and sign-on to this statement;

II. Demand that the Detroit Public Schools C.E.O. Dr. Kenneth Burnley, hold a public hearing on the future of the station and its plans to lease the network to a private or public outside entity for management;

III. Request the convening of public hearings by the Detroit City Council, the United States Congress under the guidance of local representatives Cong. John Conyers, Cong. Carolyn Cheeks-Kilpatrick and Cong. John Dingell, and the U.S. Senate under the leadership of Michigan senators Carl Levin and Deborah Stabenow;

IV. Demand that Gov. Jenifer Granholm, who is ostensibly in charge of the DPS under the reform legislation, issue an executive order to halt the leasing of the station prior to the convening of these public hearings over the future of the station;

V. Demand that all existing programming related to the African-American and other communities in Detroit continue over W-RCJ.

Without hesitation we are declaring that the greatest value of W-RCJ is that it has provided an independent alternative voice for the people of the city of Detroit and its surroundings. Such an independent, alternative voice is essential in creating a genuinely democratic society and culture. Therefore, with such an important role to

play in
the community, the educational mission of W-RCJ
must be
maintained and supported.

Committee to Save Educational Radio in Detroit

We the undersigned support the statement above
and call upon
other interested organizations, artists, scholars,
religious
leaders and concerned individuals to sign on to this
statement.

Partial list of signatories:

Dr. Gloria House, Professor Emerita, Wayne State
University
Ron Scott, Media Consultant, Host of "For My
People" TV
Prof. Charles Simmons, Journalism & Law Faculty,
EMU
Ayodela A. Bakari, Artist, Community Activist
Charity Hicks, Activist, Keep the Vote No Takeover
Coalition
Lydia Bougard, Community Activist
Kwasi Akwamu, Journalist, Community Activist
Stephanie Gollman, Educator, Community Activist
Taji Mays, Community Activist
Faune Carter, Community Activist
Imari Abdul-Khaafiq, Community Activist
Tahira K. Ahmad, Veteran Broadcaster, Community
Activist
Ebony Roberts, Writer, Community Activist
Committee for the Political Resurrection of Detroit
(CPR)
Keep the Vote, No Takeover Coalition
Christina Divers, Supporter
Nailah Njemile, DPS Alumni
Nadir Omowale, Musician
S. Freedom, Parent
Omowale Diop Ankobia, Columnist
Tania McGee, Concerned Citizen
Nkosazana Bakari, Teacher
Asandi Conner, DPS Alumni, Listener
Briana Sanders, Student, Listener
Debra Johnson, Educator, Author, DFT Presidential
Candidate
Donna Mayes, Community Supporter
Carolyn Warfield, Artist, Author
Elena Herrada, Co-Chair, CPR, Labor Leader